

Third Parties in American Politics

Why is our system primarily a two party system?

Plurality v. Majority elections- No need to create coalitions with 3rd Parties – we don't have coalition governments! (sidenote: in 2006 the Green Party candidate in Shays-Farrell election pulled out days before the election to support Farrell- no effect)

Electoral Politics- President as chief of Party- creates momentum-

Restrictive State Balloting procedures

Gerrymandering

Historical Precedent- momentum-

Socialization process

Limited Funds

Generally Excluded from Debates

3rd parties seen as wasted votes- spoilers

What type of 3rd Parties exist in American Politics

1. Ideological Parties

- a. Despite poor performance- stay in existence because voters are ideologically driven and don't want to compromise their beliefs

- i. Socialist Party
- ii. Libertarian Party
- iii. Communist Party
- iv. American Nazi Party

2. Single Issue Parties

- a. Again ideologically driven but based solely on one issue not a philosophy, often when the issue dies out, the party dies out

- i. Right to Life Party
- ii. Know Nothing
- iii. Prohibition
- iv. Free soil

3. Economic Protest Party

- a. Often geographically limited party, reaction to economic conditions that often change, sometimes major parties pick up the issues

- i. Greenback
- ii. Populist

4. Splinter or Factional Parties

- a. Split within dominant party, alienated group leaves party. Generally they get back together again or the voters in the alienated group divide up with the other party

- i. Bull Moose Party
- ii. La Follette's Progressive Party
- iii. State's Rights Party (1948), American Independent Party (1968)
(many ended up 20-30 years later as Republicans)
- iv. Henry Wallace Progressive Party
- v. John Anderson Independent Party

Will the Tea Party survive? Unclear what it's coherent ideology is. Protest- Throw the Bums out- party. Primary complaints,
entrenched Washington politicians
unresponsive to the people,
overspending,
populist and libertarian streak
fueled by a significant economic downturn